

Over northeast of Mertzon on my maternal grandfather's place, a seep spring floods the cow chute and crowd pen. Twenty miles on further east in San Angelo, bountiful rains fall in such deluges, the city's fox squirrels slip while trying to climb the pecans for a higher perch.

Lots of mornings in the outposts, such outdoorsmen as herders and fossil fuel miners dress more like firemen than cowboys and oilfield workers. Under the new climate, quite a number of youngsters, I feel sure, need schooling on wiping the mud off of shoes before coming in the house. It's still unsettled whether dust or mud upsets a housekeeper more, whether a dusty thunderstorm after spring cleaning is worse than a wet snow and a thaw prior to a Cub Scout supper. (The Good Housekeeping Institute links the fumes from an ammonia-charged mop pail to the hairline balance of the emotional system of a housekeeper, but fresh tracks on a clean floor cause a reaction wicked as nerve gas on each end of the mop handle.)

Weather experts debate whether the drouth has ended in the shortgrass country. One late analysis from Texas A&M advised caution. Pointed to the dry gullies and brush-infested draws, the empty riverbeds, lake shores and basins still to be soaked as evidence the drouth continues. Suggested consulting range experts and game management technicians. Recommended gradual restocking to avoid overgrazing and buying too many high-priced cattle.

Reading the warnings brought back the long-ago screech of an Angelo banker's desk chair swiveling to face the window behind his desk on renewal anniversaries at the San Angelo National Bank in the dry 1950s. Felt the same sensation of numbness — the identical lump in my throat. Remembered watching as the blue smoke from his cigar curling into the vast reaches of a marble hall, of clasping my chest, wondering if the tremors were cardiac failure or sheer terror.

What did this papered scholar mean, the drouth might not be over? Turned again to the report to try to understand the warning about buying high-priced cattle. Hard to know what "high-priced" cattle means. Does it mean replacement cattle in a closed herd going in at over a buck a pound on a 600 pound heifer calf to breed, pasture, feed and sell a calf from her three years later?

Try this sidelight: out here on the wet prairie land of the 09 Divide, cattle are too dear to sell on the highest market and the tallest winter grass of all time. Took 30 days to decide what day to market two crippled bulls. Looks like it's going to take the rest of the spring to part with seven barren cows and 10 cut-back calves.

One answer is that in the days of the old high-pocket jugkeepers, we filled in so many financial statements in such fine detail that we cashed dry stuff in short order. We didn't delay bringing a hundred-dollar wool check to apply on our notes. Only deception I recall was selling my empty feed sacks to raise money for Christmas. Along about

the end of the drouth, I'd have hocked my watch if I'd still owned one that ran.

In a separate article in a livestock journal, more advice came to not marry your cow herd. Quoted a story of a cowman who had just sold his entire herd at \$1300 dollars a head. Said the dispersal was the third time he had completely sold out on a good market.

I don't remember the man's name, but I am positive it wasn't "Noelke." My family ranches, and has ranched from west of the Pecos on east to the other side of Angelo for a long time. Titles of our family history book should be "Thunder May Shake A Snapping Turtle Loose," or "The Case History of Lockjaw."

Records show three of us in 1950 — the Big Boss, Goat Whiskers, and myself — held dollar wool until it reached 50 cents a pound the next year. Same scorecard shows the Big Boss and I parlayed a yearling venture once into a \$75 a head loss on an inside tip from a six-bit Fort Worth commission man. Led by Uncle Goat Whiskers, the only banker in the family, we spurned offers of 35 cents on ewe lambs one fall to be dumped as 20-cent-a-pound disasters the next spring.

Sure going to be hard to break us now. Rained again last night. Be tomorrow before the market report comes on the cow sale in Central Texas. The jugs aren't committing to make livestock loans. Nevertheless, it should be hard to resist such precious collateral as a \$1300 cow supported by a customer backed by lots of experience and plenty of rain.

Probably the best advice for all of us is to stay home and
ship the cattle to town ...